57 Sylus

Sylus

Land Of Lost

+ LOVE·AND·DEEPSPACE + +

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01 | High Alert

+ LOVE-AND-DEEPSPACE + +

Dri-Lar-404, Feathers Star.

A fully loaded spaceship returns to a planet shaped like a black diamond.

A young deputy grumbles as they pass the seventh checkpoint. They scoured the galaxy for rare treasures—gifts for the Overlord's birthday. Yet here they are, being treated like petty thieves by the guards.

"There weren't so many inspections when we left..."

"Didn't you see the latest notice?"

The Captain pulls up a holographic screen

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with an urgent alert that states the following: "Sylus has been spotted near Feathers Star. All checkpoints are on high alert."

"Sylus? That name rings a bell..."

The Captain opens the galaxy-wide wanted poster that every spaceship received.

Right at the top is Sylus.

"Most wanted criminal in Philos's history. The only one to ever escape the space-time prison. A real legend."

With a skeptical look, the Deputy mutters, "Sure, but that's in Philos. If he swings by

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here, he won't be a big deal."

"Then why is the Overlord making us jump through all these hoops?"

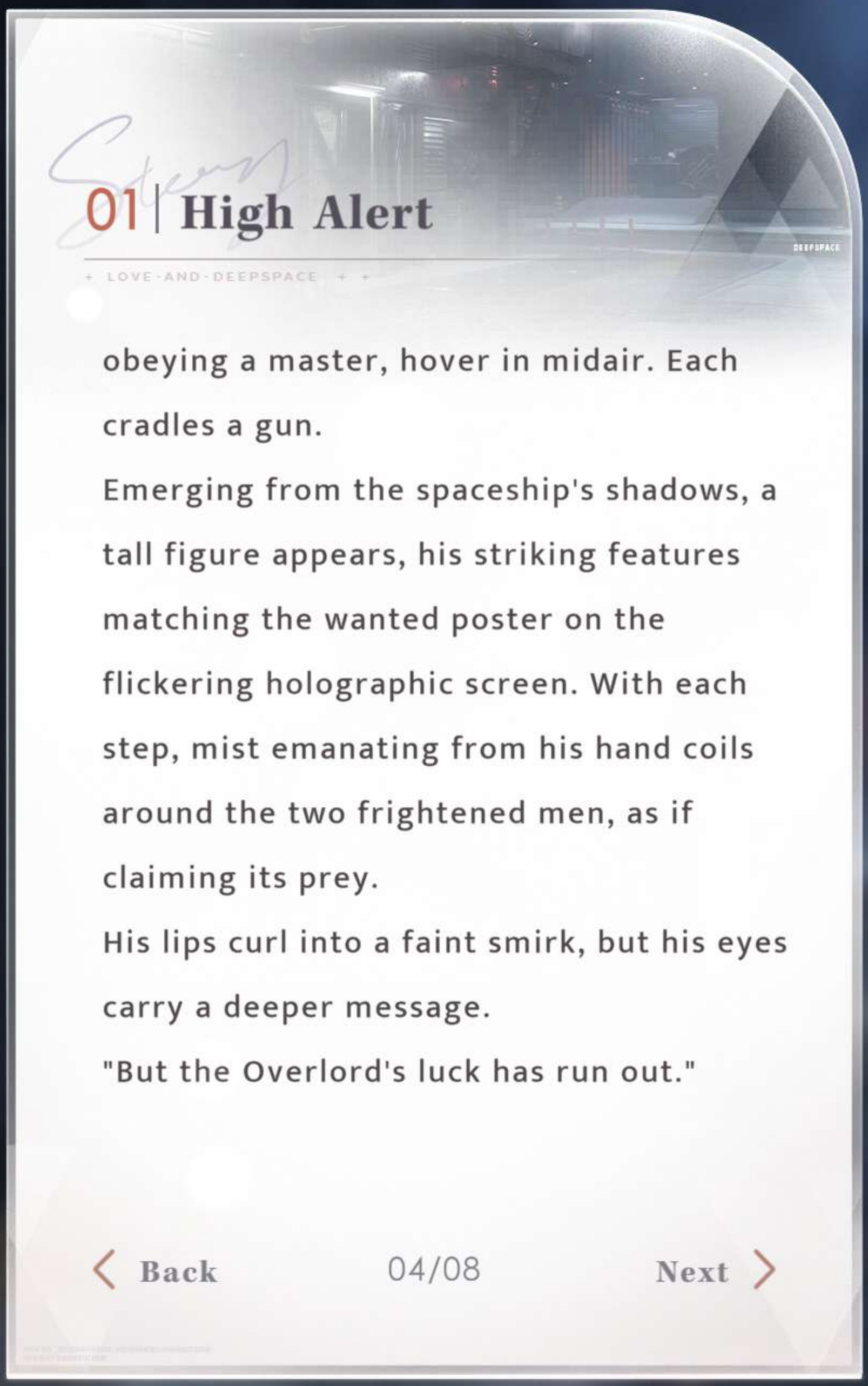
The Deputy pauses, still cocky as ever.

"While the Overlord was conquering other planets, this Sylus probably wasn't even a twinkle in his old man's eye!"

"He was lucky," a deep voice from behind says.

Startled, they stand up, their hands going to where their weapons should be. But their holsters are empty.

Two strange swirls of black-red mist, as if



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obeying a master, hover in midair. Each cradles a gun.

Emerging from the spaceship's shadows, a tall figure appears, his striking features matching the wanted poster on the flickering holographic screen. With each step, mist emanating from his hand coils around the two frightened men, as if claiming its prey.

His lips curl into a faint smirk, but his eyes carry a deeper message.

"But the Overlord's luck has run out."

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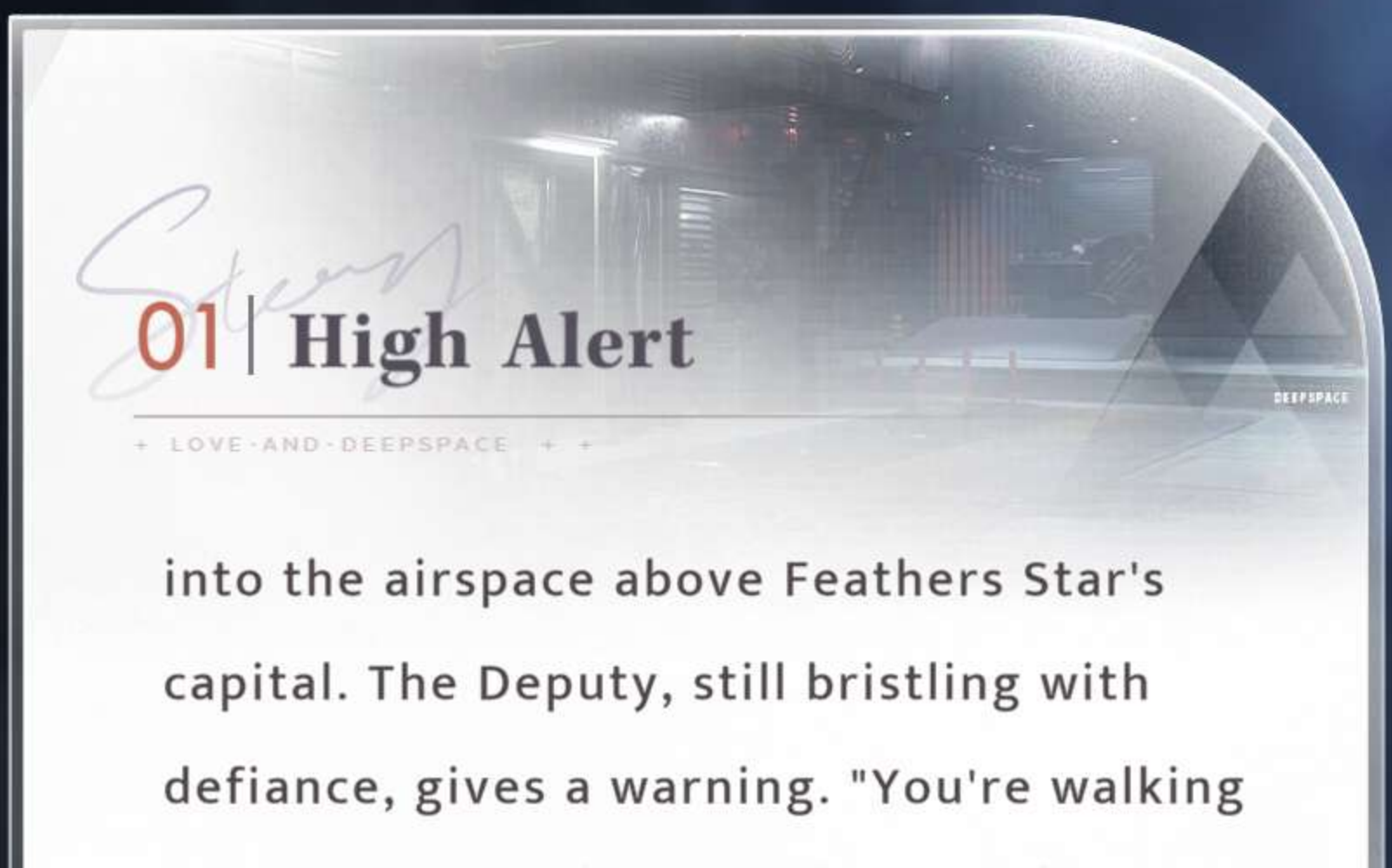
As the ship nears the final checkpoint, a detection window pops up. An electronic voice states, "Password."

"R79-G32..."

The Captain recites a string of numbers and letters with the utmost caution, knowing that any mistake could tighten the mist's grip around his neck.

The window's light scans the Captain's face. An electronic voice then states, "Biometric verification confirmed. Please proceed."

The ship glides past the checkpoint and



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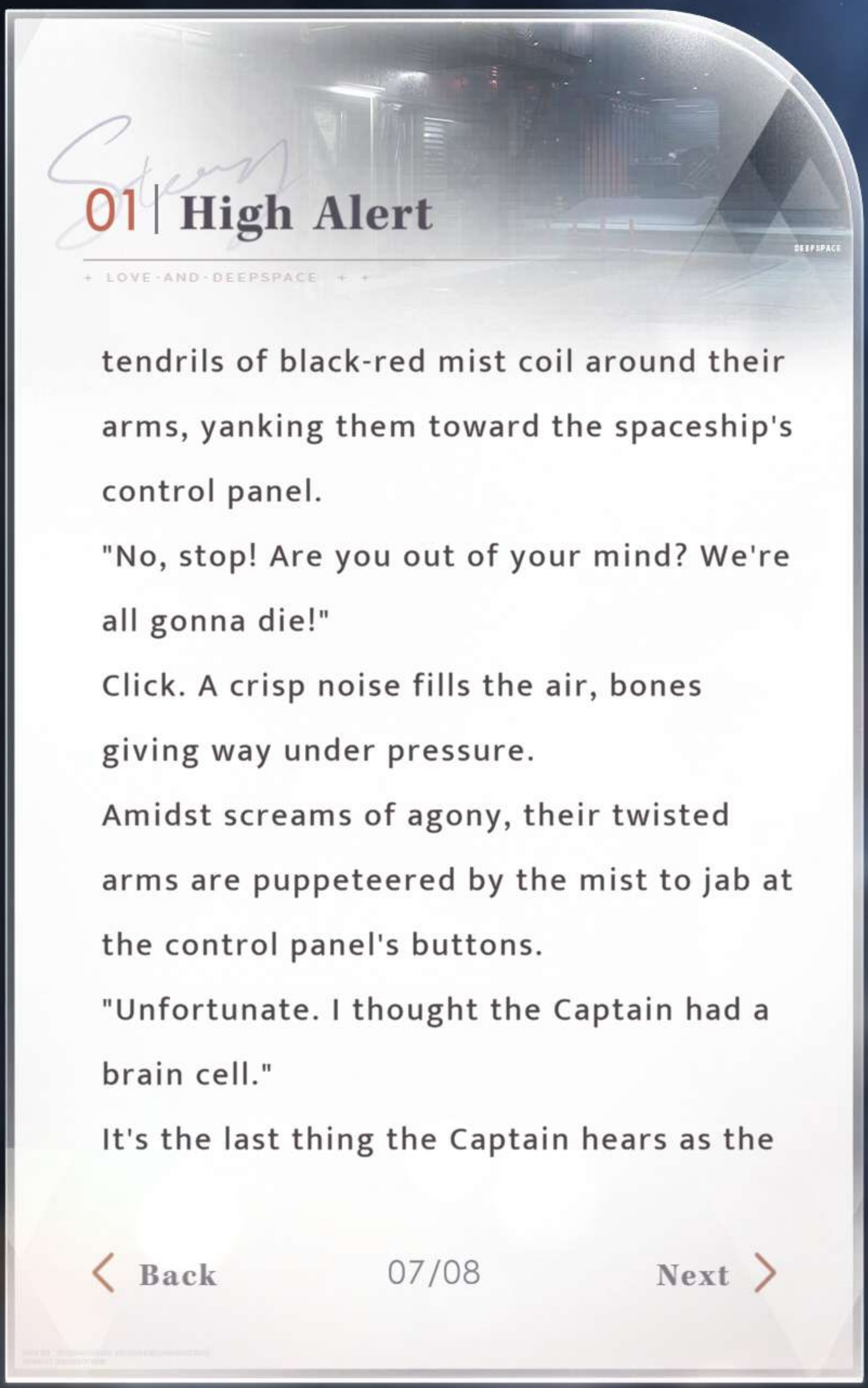
into the airspace above Feathers Star's capital. The Deputy, still bristling with defiance, gives a warning. "You're walking into a trap. You know nothing of the Overlord's might."

Meanwhile, Sylus lounges on the couch behind them, idly toying with the confiscated guns. He's unfazed.

"That depends on whether or not his trap can handle the weight of a spaceship."

"What the..."

The Captain and Deputy exchange a panicked look. But before they can react,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tendrils of black-red mist coil around their arms, yanking them toward the spaceship's control panel.
"No, stop! Are you out of your mind? We're all gonna die!"
Click. A crisp noise fills the air, bones giving way under pressure.
Amidst screams of agony, their twisted arms are puppeteered by the mist to jab at the control panel's buttons.
"Unfortunate. I thought the Captain had a brain cell."
It's the last thing the Captain hears as the
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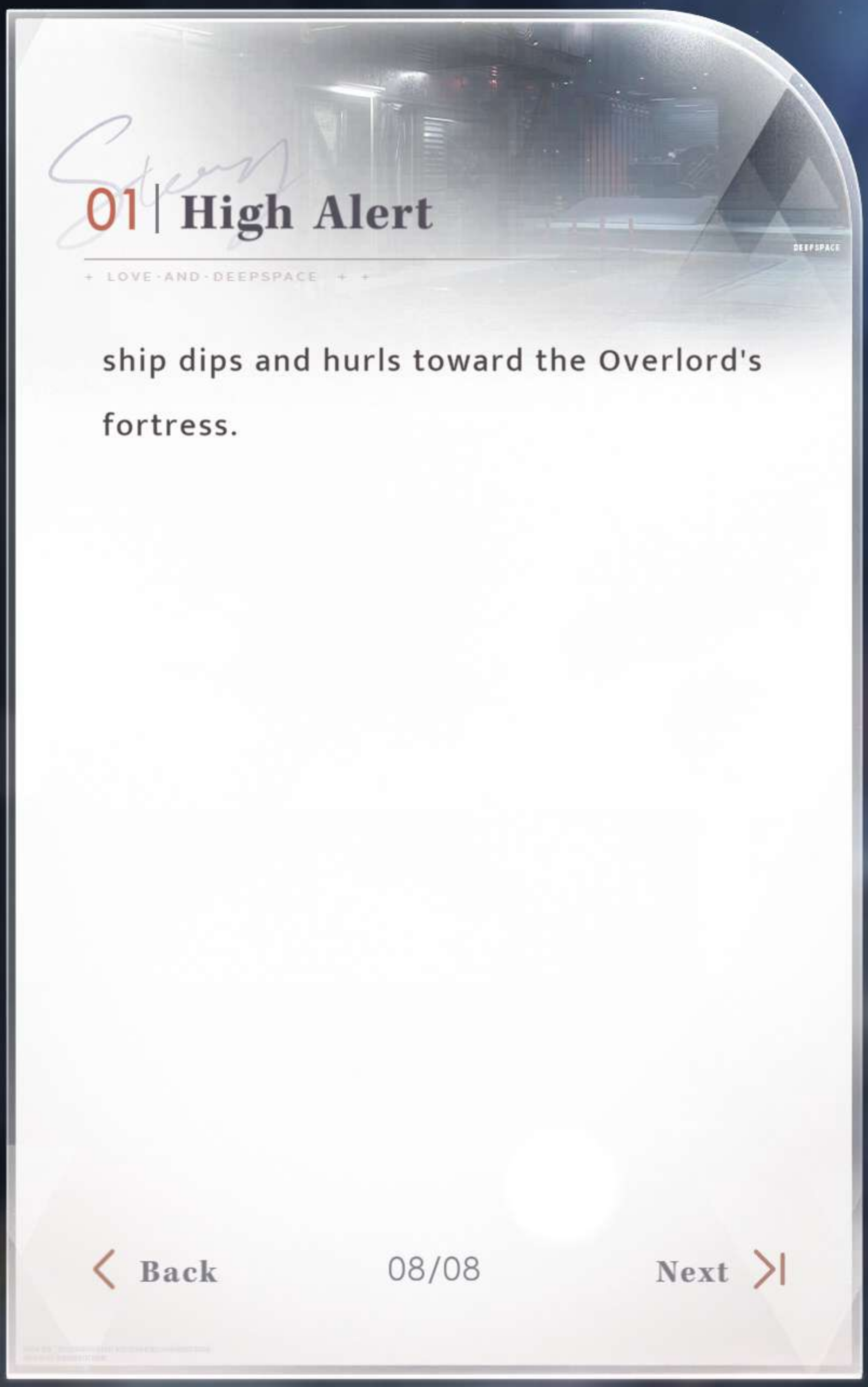

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ship dips and hurls toward the Overlord's fortress.

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02 | Absolute Suppression

The impact caused great fire, illuminating the night sky above Feathers Star's capital. The fully-armed Overlord hurries to the depths of his fortress, where lies a treasured bunker. It was with these very implements that he subdued Feathers Star, turning it into a cesspool of vice that leaves galaxies full of dread. As for the army outside, each soldier is a villain, their hands stained with blood...

The Overlord's attempt at self-comfort is interrupted by the endless screaming outside. Behind the thick door acting as a

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barrier, he doesn't know what's happening in the unfolding chaos.

Suddenly, tendrils of black-red mist breach the supposedly secure door. They wrap around him and drag him toward the detection device.

"Biometric data confirmed." The electronic voice rings out as the door, designed to withstand any assault, swings open. It's as if a red carpet is being rolled out for an unexpected guest.

But the smiling figure who walks in doesn't act like one. He eyes the glittering

02 | Absolute Suppression

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treasures in the bunker.

"I thought you'd head straight for the armory. You spared me the trouble of doing some extra work."

"You've gone through a lot just for these, huh? You may have them all..." As a seasoned criminal, the Overlord knows when to yield to a superior adversary.

Sylus sits on the Diamond Throne, crafted by the Overlord himself. The mist obediently fetches the treasures from a cabinet.

"The Dawn Galaxy's Nebula Stone,

02 | Absolute Suppression

Rainharp's Holy Crystal... You've certainly plundered your fair share of places."

"Recognizing these gems so easily... Aren't you just like me?" It's been ages since the Overlord had to slap on a fake grin. It's a little goofy. "You got the muscle. I got the goods. How about we make a deal? Stick with me. I have a bunch of people here ready to kick the bucket for you."

Sylus lets out a lazy chuckle as if a bad joke was just told. "Unfortunately, none of the loot here will satiate my appetite."

"What do you want?"

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Sylus raises a finger, the mist pulling the Overlord to him. He leans in and locks eyes with the Overlord, and his right eye emits a faint glow.

"I had to embark on a long journey. What I want is the whole planet. Is that okay?"

The Overlord's gaze starts to glaze over as he plops down to the ground, staring blankly at the man on the throne.

His lips twitch uncontrollably. "...Yes."

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The partially destroyed fortress is slowly being repaired, and everyone is preparing for the Overlord's birthday. Even though the Overlord called off the interstellar checkpoint alert, started counting the spaceships in the fortress, and raised the requirements for gifts from the visiting High Lords, people don't question it because of his history of being a greedy and capricious dictator. There are just rumors that the Overlord's been tied up with a mystery guest. "You lost again." Smirking, Sylus flips the king on the

03 | Mysterious Visitor

chessboard. "You already coughed up 97 spaceships. To fill them back up, you'll need a lot of gifts. Can you do it?"

"That's nothing..." The Overlord, stuck on his throne by the mist, manages to flash a grin. Only during a game of chess is he allowed to have a brief moment of clarity.

"As long as I give you what you want, you'll let me go, right?"

Sylus nonchalantly resets the chessboard.

"I prefer a nice 100 over 97."

Bastard!

For the first time in his rotten life, this

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slips into the wicked Overlord's thoughts. But he keeps up his eager facade. "Sure, sure."

Outside the floor-to-ceiling windows lies an artificial garden. Glowing eyes lurk in the shadows with the occasional growl breaking the silence.

"Are they yours?" Sylus asks, laid-back.

"They've been hand-picked by the High Lords from all over the land. If you're interested, I can have them loaded onto your spaceship."

"A cage is no place for beasts." He casually

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starts another game of chess.

As the Overlord's birthday draws near, spaceships loaded with gifts continue to enter the planet, lining up at the port as instructed. The High Lords flock to the fortress to pay their respects.
As they settle down in the banquet hall, the room's fancy, crystal chandeliers suddenly go out, plunging everyone into darkness. In the shadows, red mist moves like vines and seals off all entrances and exits.

03 | Mysterious Visitor

Some try to break through the blockade. But as soon as they get close to the mist, screams resound, which sends shivers down their spines.

"Everyone." A deep voice cuts through the anxiety from behind the Overlord's throne. "You have yet to wish today's star a happy birthday."

Accompanied by the strike of a match, red candlelight flickers. It casts an eerie glow on a sharply outlined face, his light hair barely visible.

Sylus casually settles at the edge of the

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banquet table, sticking a lit candle into the elaborately decorated cake at its center. The faint lighting reveals a hint of fear in the guests' eyes.

"Oh, wait. I don't know how old the Overlord is this year," Sylus remarks. He taps the area around his right eye.

The Overlord, under the sway of some mysterious force, is unaware of his surroundings. So when he snaps out of it, he finds the High Lords all ensnared in the candlelight and mist along the table.

"You've been around for a long, long time.

03 | Mysterious Visitor

Missing one birthday won't be the end of the world," Sylus says as he spreads some frosting onto a cake knife. He brings it to the Overlord's lips. "But if this is our final celebration, we should make it unforgettable."

"Sylus, please, spare me... I'll give you anything..."

As the knife touches his quivering mouth, the sickeningly sweet frosting mixes with the taste of blood, triggering painful vomiting.

The undisputed ruler of this dark planet is

03 | Mysterious Visitor

being played like a fool. It's a sight that, combined with the name "Sylus," leaves the long-extravagant High Lords powerless to fight back.

"Our army... Outside..." A High Lord struggles in his final breath.

As if on cue, a deafening explosion echoes from afar and shakes the banquet hall.

The Overlord can't help but widen his eyes.

"That's..."

"There goes the candle I set in the armory. Happy birthday." Sylus relishes the way everyone's faces change in the dim light.

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"Now it's your turn to show some sincerity." He stands up and pats the Overlord's shoulder. "The Overlord's life is a storage's worth of treasures from 100 ships. Anyone who brings less might not taste the birthday cake today."

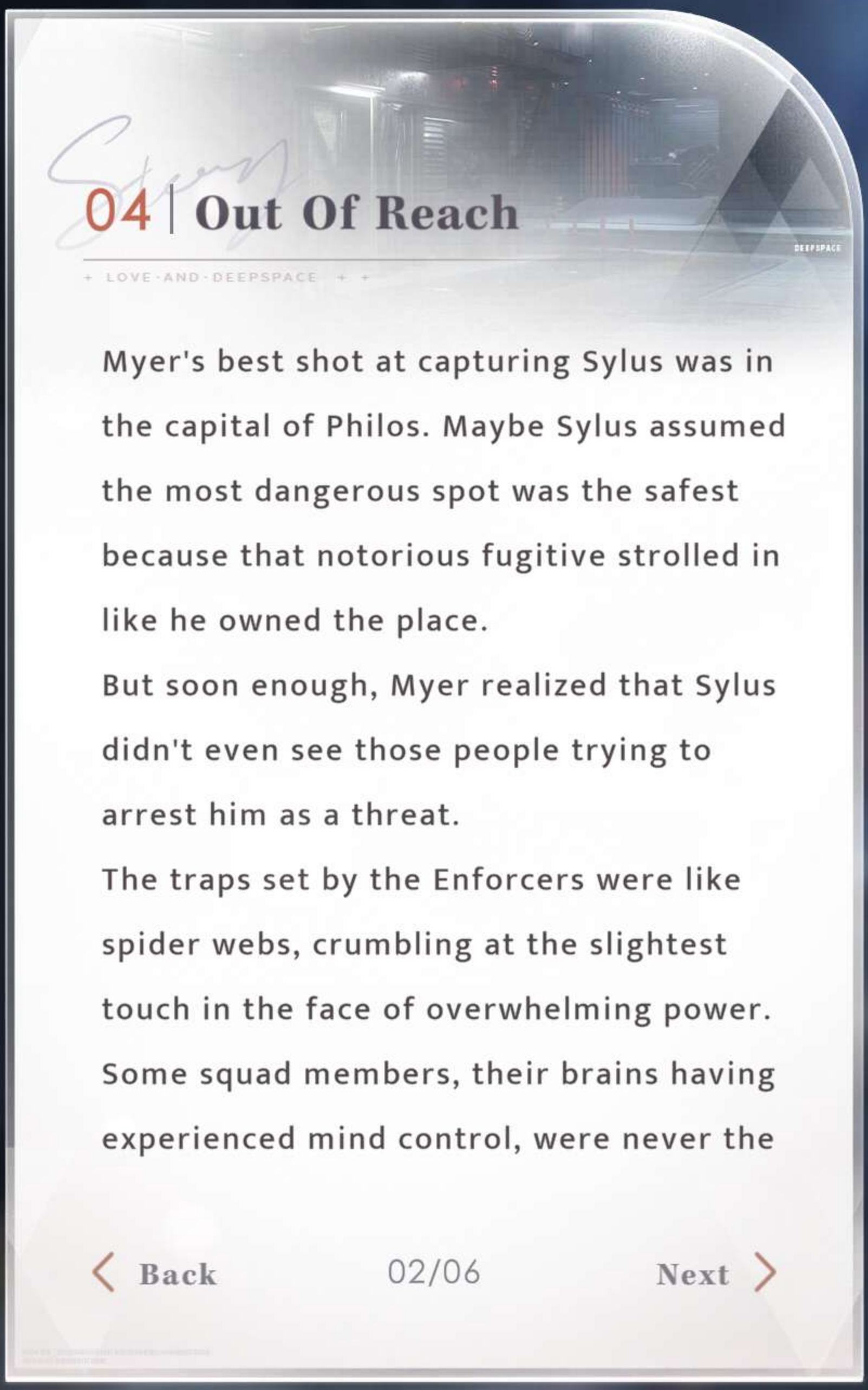
04 | Out Of Reach

Arresting Sylus is Myer's dream. He used to think every Astral Enforcer shared it, but his boss's cryptic smile told a different tale.

"Kid, it's good to dream."

In time, he understood what his boss meant—it's better to admire dreams from afar.

Yet a spark still flickers in Myer's heart. If an Enforcer had arrested Sylus and thrown him into the space-time prison, why can't he be the one to toss this escapee back in?



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Myer's best shot at capturing Sylus was in the capital of Philos. Maybe Sylus assumed the most dangerous spot was the safest because that notorious fugitive strolled in like he owned the place.

But soon enough, Myer realized that Sylus didn't even see those people trying to arrest him as a threat.

The traps set by the Enforcers were like spider webs, crumbling at the slightest touch in the face of overwhelming power. Some squad members, their brains having experienced mind control, were never the

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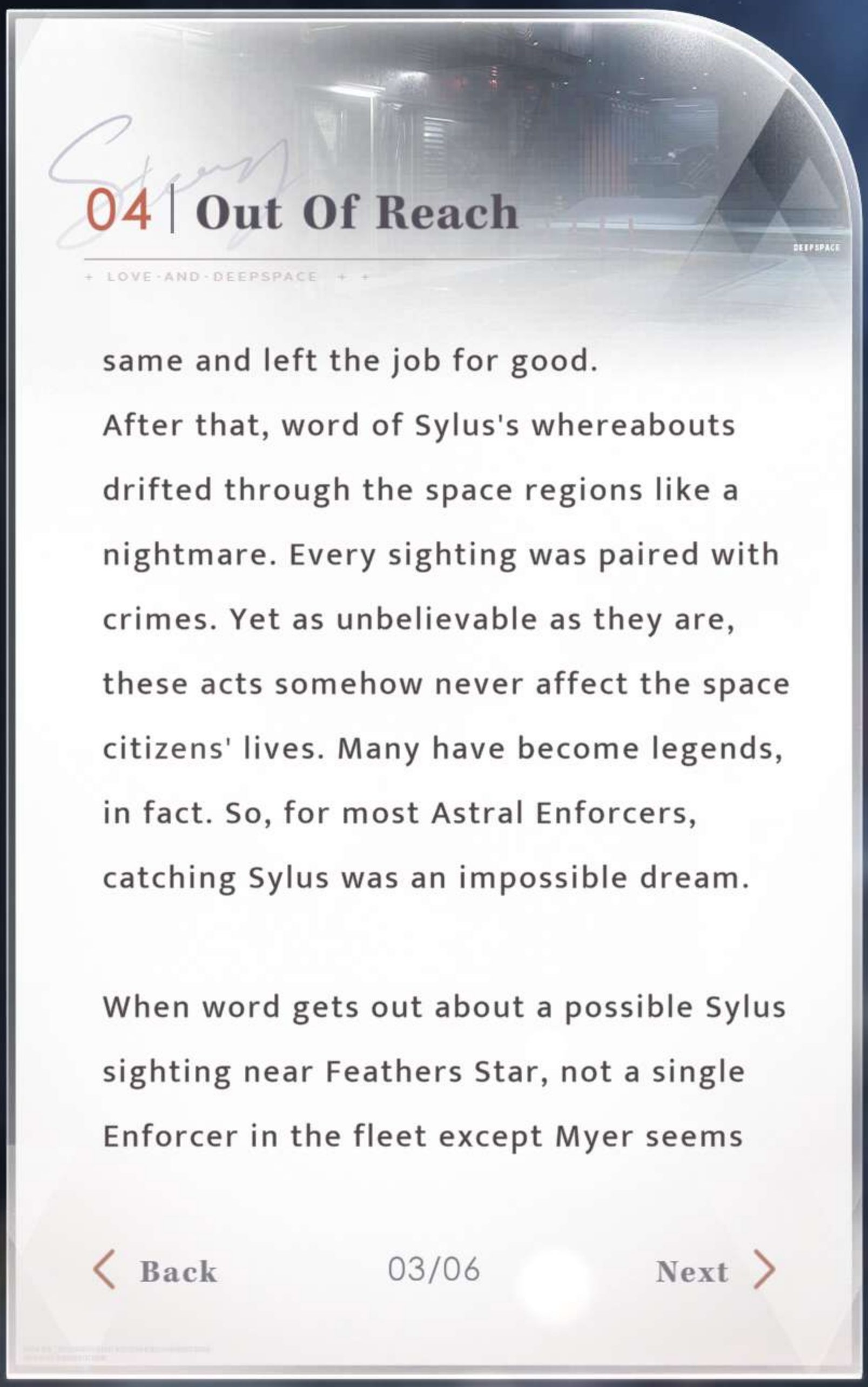

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same and left the job for good.

After that, word of Sylus's whereabouts drifted through the space regions like a nightmare. Every sighting was paired with crimes. Yet as unbelievable as they are, these acts somehow never affect the space citizens' lives. Many have become legends, in fact. So, for most Astral Enforcers, catching Sylus was an impossible dream.

When word gets out about a possible Sylus sighting near Feathers Star, not a single Enforcer in the fleet except Myer seems

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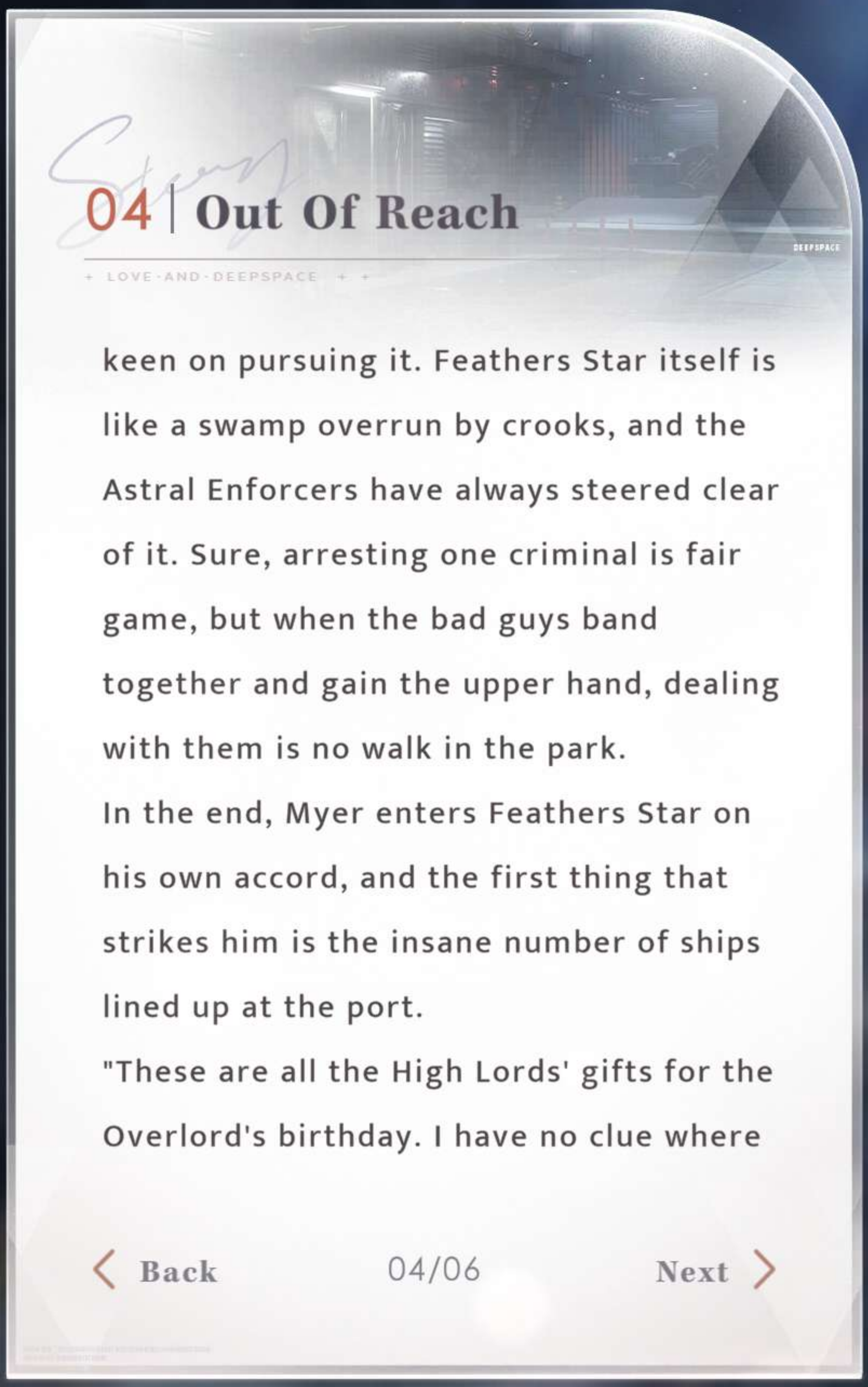

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keen on pursuing it. Feathers Star itself is like a swamp overrun by crooks, and the Astral Enforcers have always steered clear of it. Sure, arresting one criminal is fair game, but when the bad guys band together and gain the upper hand, dealing with them is no walk in the park.

In the end, Myer enters Feathers Star on his own accord, and the first thing that strikes him is the insane number of ships lined up at the port.

"These are all the High Lords' gifts for the Overlord's birthday. I have no clue where

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they went prowling to get such a haul. The number of ships is easily in the dozens. A whole lot more compared to years past," the port official grumbles.

Myer grimaces. The offhand remark of "prowling" by the official hints that countless planets and regions were pillaged.

A squad of fully armed Feathers Star soldiers storms into the port. "By the Overlord's orders, these ships are now under military control."

Once the Overlord's seal is verified by the

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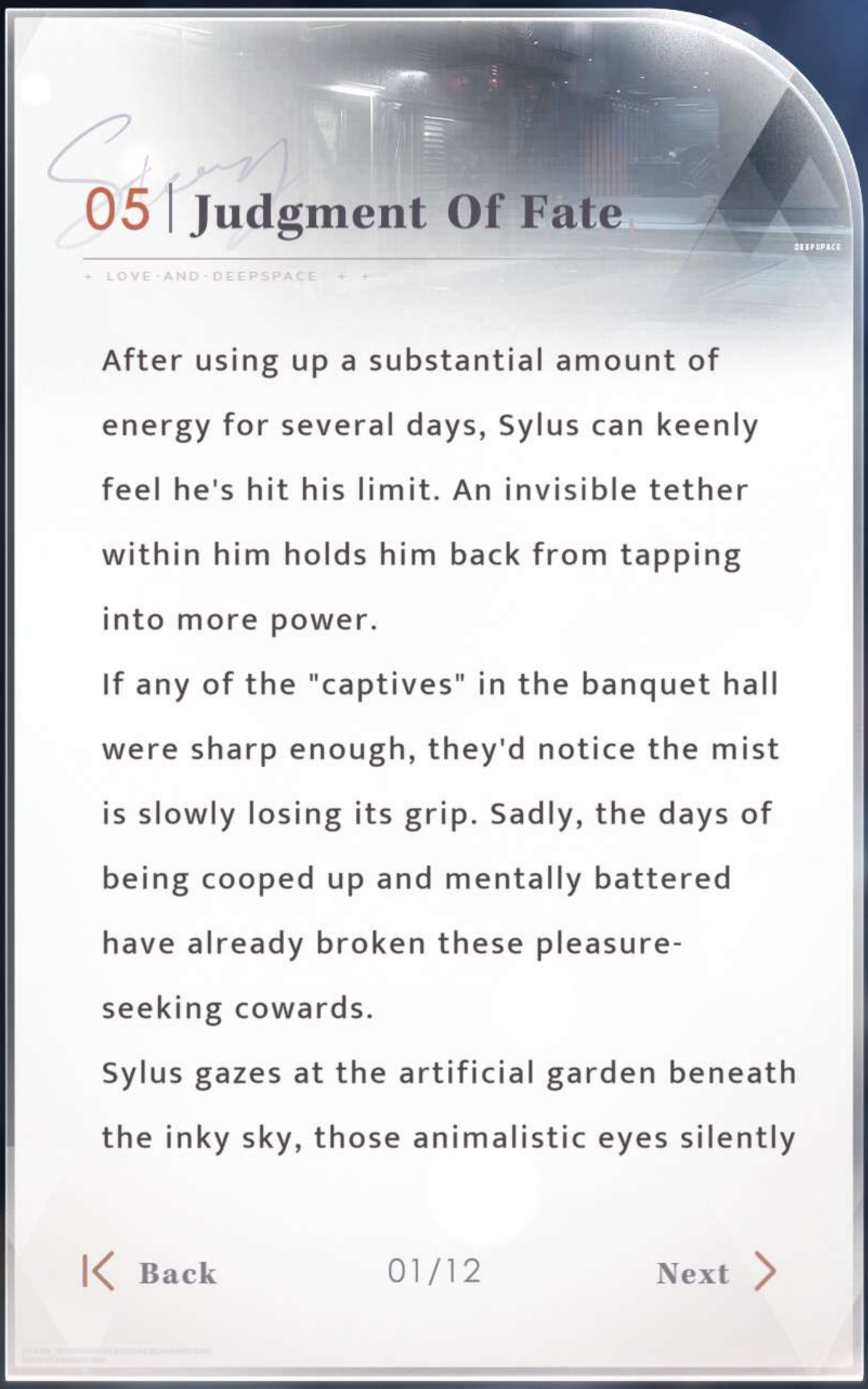
system, the official watches with deference as the soldiers board each ship one at a time.

"The High Lords must be throwing quite the party for the Overlord's birthday. I envy them. You know, I wonder if I'll ever get a shot at attending his birthday..." The official casts a wistful glance at the Overlord's fortress in the distance.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After using up a substantial amount of energy for several days, Sylus can keenly feel he's hit his limit. An invisible tether within him holds him back from tapping into more power.
If any of the "captives" in the banquet hall were sharp enough, they'd notice the mist is slowly losing its grip. Sadly, the days of being cooped up and mentally battered have already broken these pleasure-seeking cowards.
Sylus gazes at the artificial garden beneath the inky sky, those animalistic eyes silently
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locking onto him. He wonders how long they've been trapped there and if their wild instincts remain.

"Sylus... My coffers have been emptied out..." Trembling, a High Lord makes a confession. It's clear this last one is unable to cough up an amount equal to a hundred ships.

Sylus saunters over just as the shivering man cowers, scared he'll end up as a minion like the Overlord.

"Please, please..." he begs, closing his eyes.

"Sometimes, real treasures aren't what you

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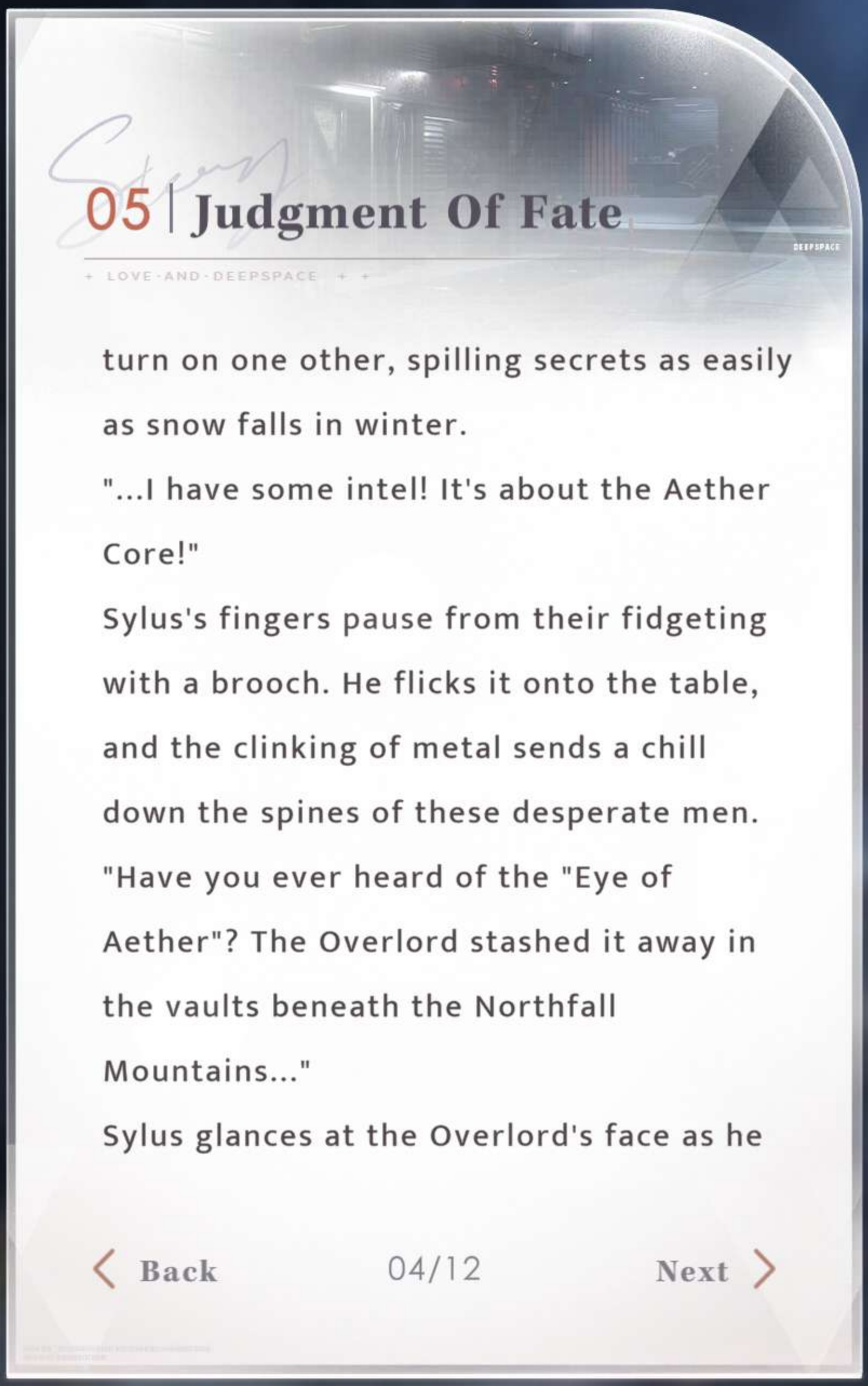
see with your eyes," Sylus remarks. He taps his temple with his finger. A smile appears on his lips as he looks at the High Lord. "A nugget of valuable intel often fetches a sliver of life."

The High Lord cautiously opens his eyes and sneakily glances at his peers before gritting his teeth. "...I know there's a High Lord here who has quite the fortune elsewhere. It's enough to fill 200 ships."

With that piece of info revealed, a wave of betrayals and accusations ensues. In a desperate bid to survive, the High Lords



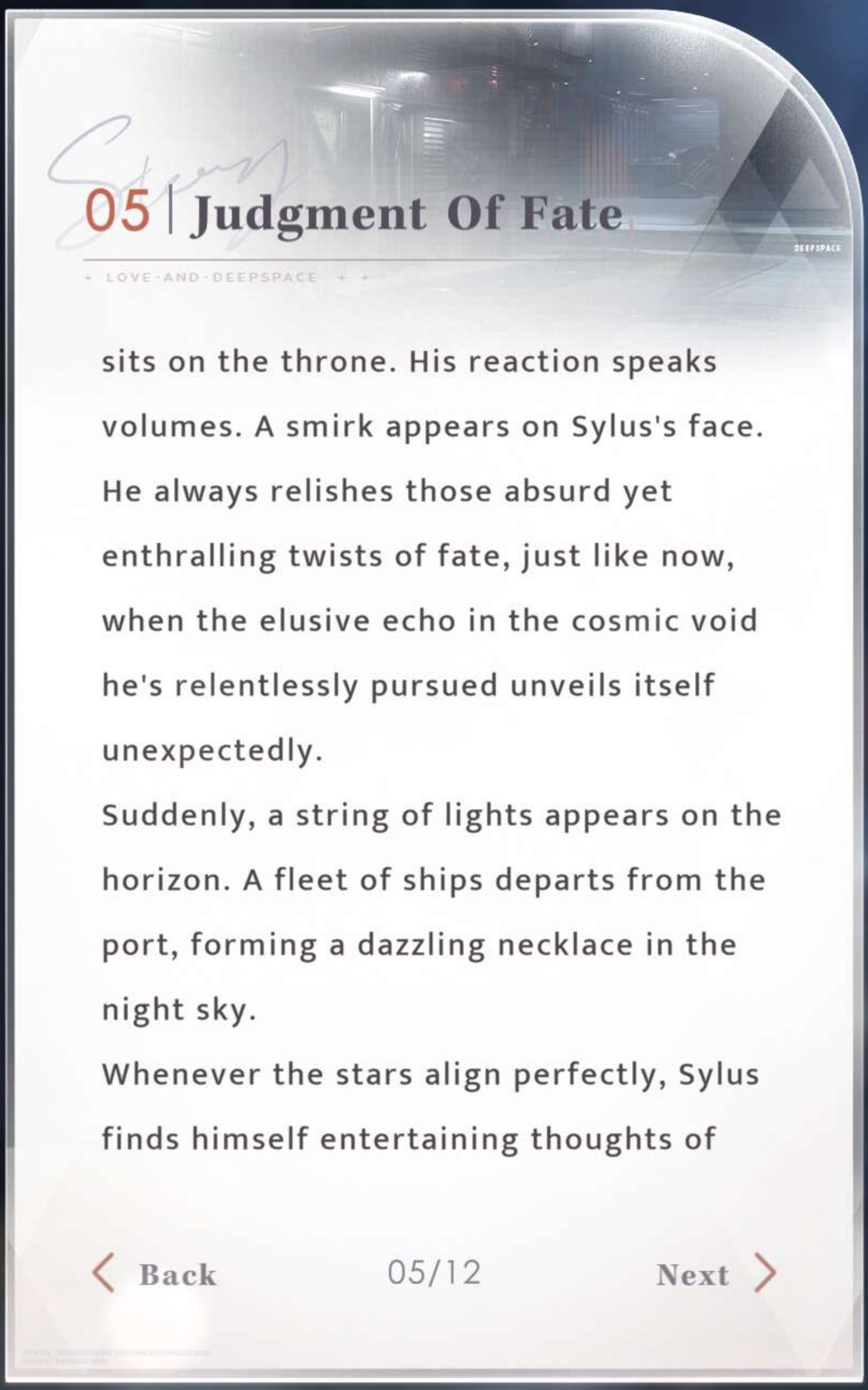
turn on one other, spilling secrets as easily as snow falls in winter.

"...I have some intel! It's about the Aether Core!"

Sylus's fingers pause from their fidgeting with a brooch. He flicks it onto the table, and the clinking of metal sends a chill down the spines of these desperate men.

"Have you ever heard of the "Eye of Aether"? The Overlord stashed it away in the vaults beneath the Northfall Mountains..."

Sylus glances at the Overlord's face as he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sits on the throne. His reaction speaks volumes. A smirk appears on Sylus's face. He always relishes those absurd yet enthralling twists of fate, just like now, when the elusive echo in the cosmic void he's relentlessly pursued unveils itself unexpectedly.
Suddenly, a string of lights appears on the horizon. A fleet of ships departs from the port, forming a dazzling necklace in the night sky.
Whenever the stars align perfectly, Sylus finds himself entertaining thoughts of
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destiny.

Now is the time to act on it.

He casts one last look over his shoulder.

He sees the table and the cowards still double-crossing one another. Maybe their fate, too, should be left to the destiny's whims.

He takes out his gun and unleashes a flurry of shots at the floor-to-ceiling windows.

The High Lords cease their bickering, their eyes widening in horror at the firearm and pieces of glass littering the floor.

Sylus walks over the glass shards and

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marches into the artificial garden. Under the moonlight, the eyes hiding in the vegetation blink to life one by one, moving closer to him.

"Let's see what's left of you after spending so much time in captivity." His right eye scans each bestial gaze.

The turmoil in them begins to settle, replaced by a simmering hatred akin to blades being unsheathed in the darkness. Their thirst for vengeance is directed at those responsible for hunting, butchering, and imprisoning them.

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With a snarl, the beasts bare their teeth. Shadows dart into the banquet hall. The nefarious villains barely have a moment to let out a scream before their blood paints the sin-stained fortress a vivid crimson. Meanwhile, Sylus vanishes into the night.

"Myer, did you hear how everyone from the Overlord to High Lords in the Feathers Star died overnight?"
"They're saying the beasts kept in the fortress went mad and tore them to shreds."

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"The scene is too gruesome to describe as a river of blood. Just one glance at the holographic replica can haunt someone for life."

"And on that night, several hundred ships left the port. We tracked them for a bit as they headed to various planets. Then their signals disappeared."

The Enforcers in the fleet are talking about the terrifying Night of Blood that took place on the Feathers Star.

Myer enters the simulation room, pulling up the crime scene data for a holographic

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recreation. Fighting through the discomfort, he tries to find evidence to confirm his suspicions.

"Sylus... Sylus did it!"
The Enforcers, still in a heated discussion, are astonished as their colleague bursts into the room. Myer projects a hologram. There's a brooch soaked in blood.
"Something made from the same material as this brooch was there when Sylus escaped from Philos... Sylus was in the banquet hall that night. He committed all

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these crimes... even plundered the planet's wealth!"

The Enforcers scrutinize the analysis displayed on the screen. "This material is centuries old. It's been used in countless artifacts over time."

"As legendary as Sylus may be, the idea of one person looting an entire planet still seems far-fetched."

"But without those tyrants, the creatures of Feathers Star were spared. They almost went extinct."

Before long, the conversation veers in a

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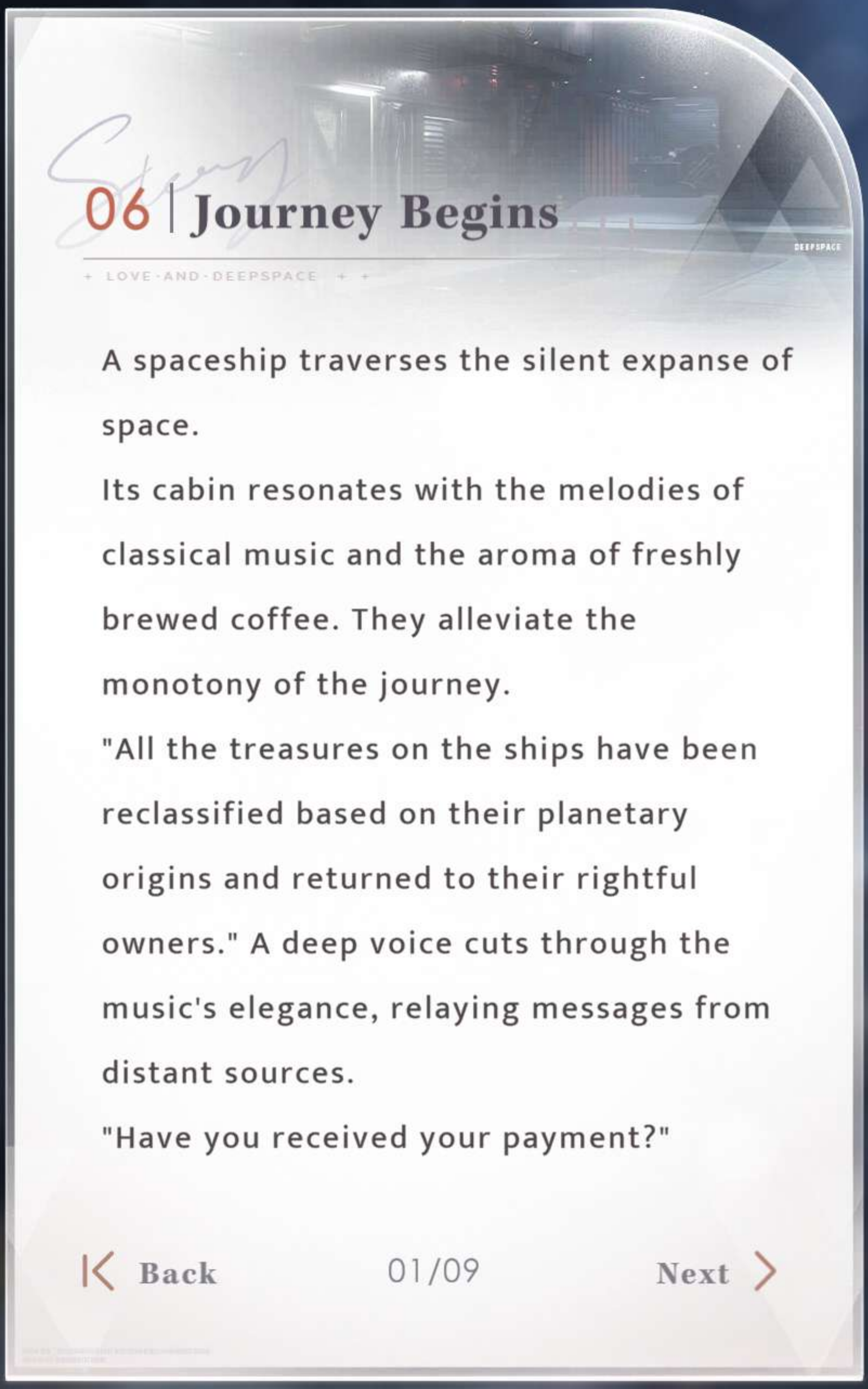
different direction. But in the background, that holographically restored brooch seems to glimmer faintly. It captivates the dreamer still in pursuit of that impossible dream.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A spaceship traverses the silent expanse of space.
Its cabin resonates with the melodies of classical music and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. They alleviate the monotony of the journey.
"All the treasures on the ships have been reclassified based on their planetary origins and returned to their rightful owners." A deep voice cuts through the music's elegance, relaying messages from distant sources.
"Have you received your payment?"
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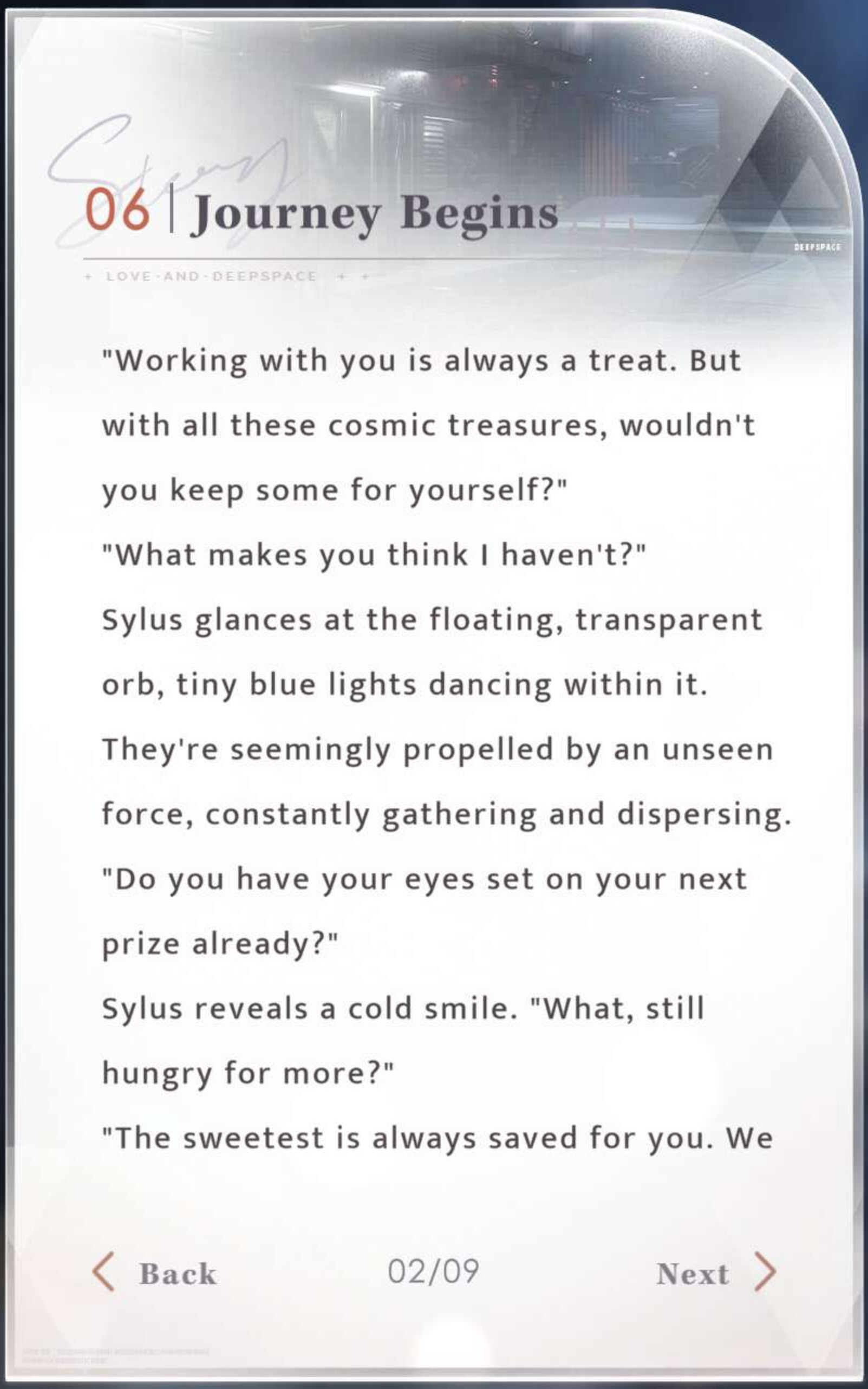
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"Working with you is always a treat. But with all these cosmic treasures, wouldn't you keep some for yourself?"
"What makes you think I haven't?"
Sylus glances at the floating, transparent orb, tiny blue lights dancing within it. They're seemingly propelled by an unseen force, constantly gathering and dispersing.
"Do you have your eyes set on your next prize already?"
Sylus reveals a cold smile. "What, still hungry for more?"
"The sweetest is always saved for you. We
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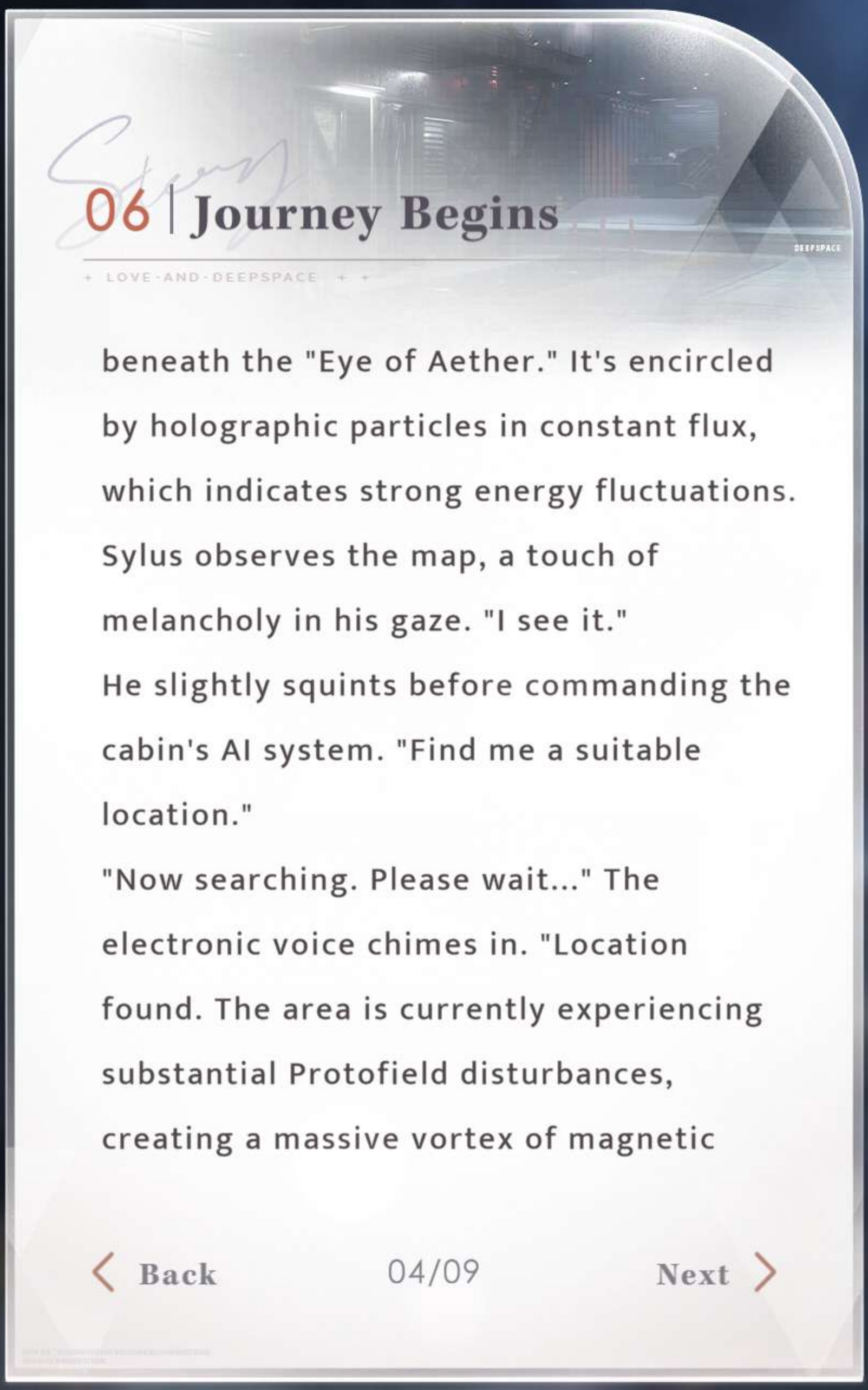
just want a little taste."

"You better learn to quit while you're ahead. Our next target isn't something you can grab."

Sylus impatiently flicks his finger, and the comms channel is abruptly cut off.

The cabin then unveils a massive, holographic interstellar map. The floating orb suddenly convulses violently, its tiny lights breaking free and scattering across the map. They gradually regroup and point to a small planet.

The map zooms in on the destination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beneath the "Eye of Aether." It's encircled by holographic particles in constant flux, which indicates strong energy fluctuations.
Sylus observes the map, a touch of melancholy in his gaze. "I see it."
He slightly squints before commanding the cabin's AI system. "Find me a suitable location."
"Now searching. Please wait..." The electronic voice chimes in. "Location found. The area is currently experiencing substantial Protofield disturbances, creating a massive vortex of magnetic
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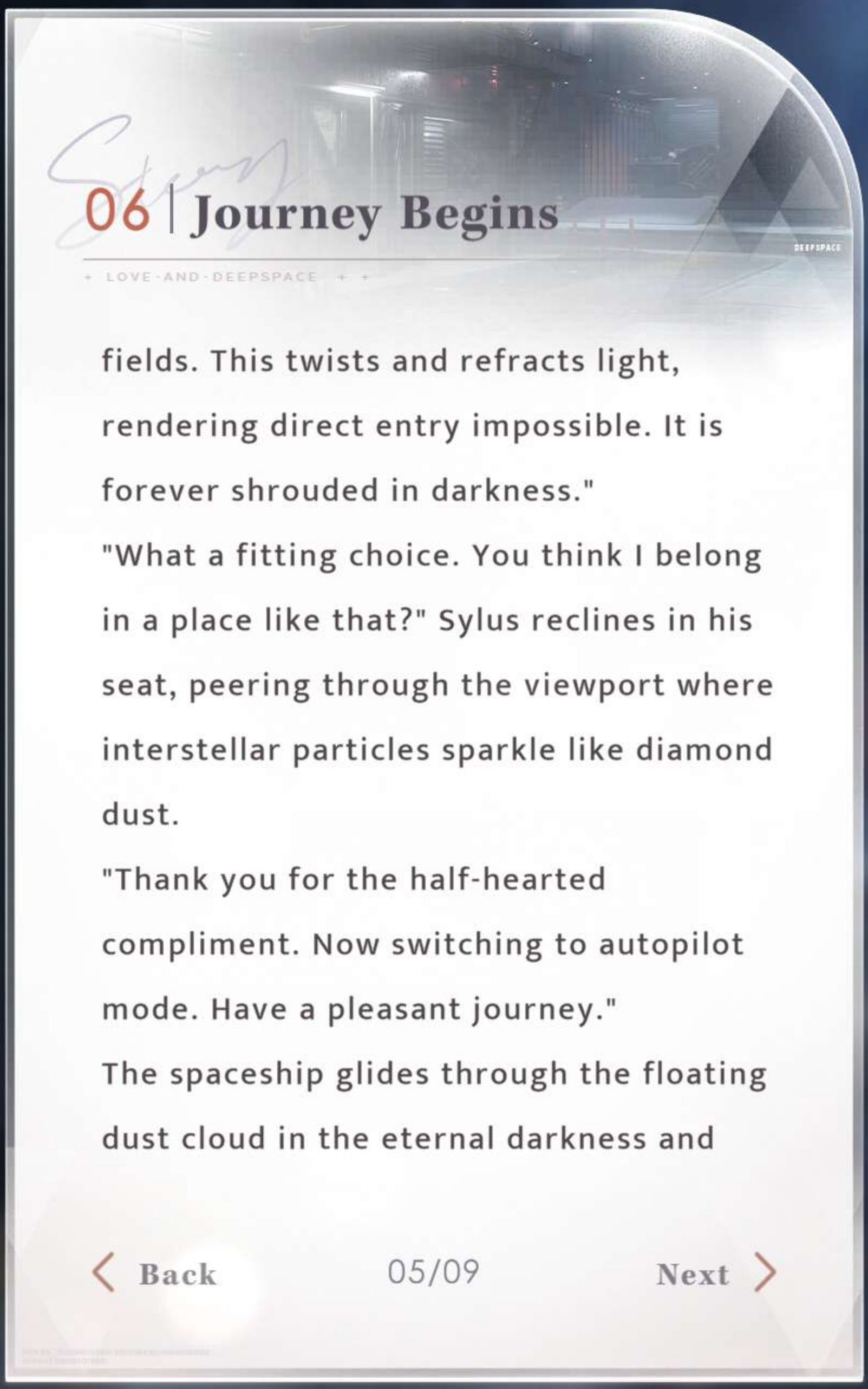
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fields. This twists and refracts light, rendering direct entry impossible. It is forever shrouded in darkness."
"What a fitting choice. You think I belong in a place like that?" Sylus reclines in his seat, peering through the viewport where interstellar particles sparkle like diamond dust.
"Thank you for the half-hearted compliment. Now switching to autopilot mode. Have a pleasant journey."
The spaceship glides through the floating dust cloud in the eternal darkness and
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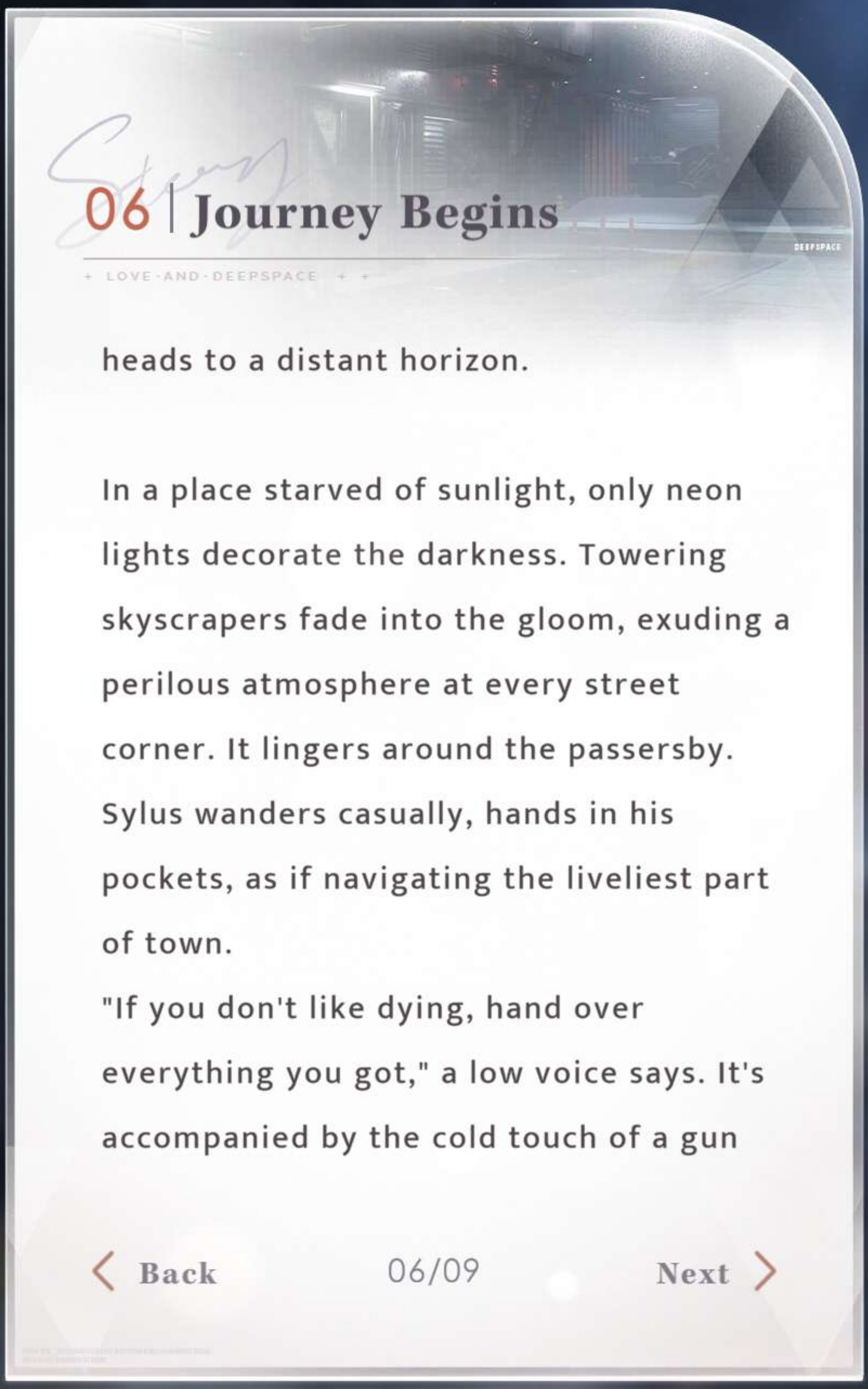
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heads to a distant horizon.
In a place starved of sunlight, only neon lights decorate the darkness. Towering skyscrapers fade into the gloom, exuding a perilous atmosphere at every street corner. It lingers around the passersby. Sylus wanders casually, hands in his pockets, as if navigating the liveliest part of town.
"If you don't like dying, hand over everything you got," a low voice says. It's accompanied by the cold touch of a gun
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barrel.

Sylus turns, his eyes briefly scanning the large figure behind him. A slow chuckle escapes his lips. "Ah, lucky number thirteen."

Before the man can even utter a "what," black-red mist deftly twists his wrist, redirecting the gun muzzle to his own temple.

"While I often enjoy killing time, no one likes flies buzzing around," Sylus remarks, his gaze drifting from the man's pale face down to his attire. "Maybe it's because I'm

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not blending in."

Under indifferent, cold scrutiny, the thug's legs tremble. His mind momentarily stops working at the unexpected question.

"What's the fashion like around here?"

"Huh?"

The gun floats in midair, its pressure against his scalp growing impatient.

"L-like that..." The thug gestures with trembling fingers at an advertisement flashing on a mall's large screen—a man wears a leather jacket as he zooms through neon-lit streets on a hefty motorcycle.

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Sylus raises an eyebrow. "All right, then. When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

The N109 Zone is about to greet its new ruler.